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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses community collaboration, explaining that the essence of after school care and education is partnering among institutions and individuals, with a new ethos built around program, family, and child needs. It suggests that most partnerships in after school programs create "intermediary environments," which are typically participatory and foster democratic ideals, are usually creative and innovative, are models of leadership and effective time use, and are vulnerable to power struggles as one collaborating group or another may vie for control. The paper describes some of the special features of after school programs that arise from and are governed by collaborations. It expands the theoretical frame and introduces a typology of partnerships and their implications for developing intermediary after school spaces. The paper introduces four types of intersection that apply to many types of collaboration: discovering overlapping interests (functional), joining forces (collaborative), developing an inclusive system (interconnected), and changing all partners (transformational). (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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Afterschool Time:
Toward a Theory of Collaborations

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1. Introduction

Everyone who creates programs providing services or interventions for children and youth has encountered a similar moment. It is when we recognize that the young people we work with are not just passive recipients, but are active co-creators of programs. My research team and I have been fortunate to experience many such moments in our six years of in-school and after-school work in Boston middle schools (e.g., Noam, Pucci, & Foster, 1999). During our first year of the RALLY program (Responsive Advocacy for Life and Learning in Youth) at the Taft Middle School in Allston-Brighton we were introducing an integrated mental health and education initiative. It was our first foray into the world of community-based child programming and we had made good progress in establishing an important new professional role, the "prevention practitioner." These individuals focus on at-risk youth while supporting all children in classroom settings so new problems can be detected earlier.

One of our practitioners was working with a teacher in a 7th grade classroom to support a boy named Mark. This 12-year-old child was usually inattentive in class, rarely came to school prepared, and was failing most of his classes. It was early in the year and most teachers had already begun to give up on Mark. His mother, who was raising him by herself, could not force him to do the work either. It was not for a lack of trying! She met with his teachers and took away all his privileges. This included the one activity he loved most: playing basketball on a Boys and Girls Club team. Mark was regularly upstaged by his younger sister who was a star at home and at school. He was clearly on his way to having to repeat 7th grade, even though everyone agreed that such a threat would not make him work any harder. He had "checked out" and no one really knew what to do.

The practitioner began to notice that when we gave Mark a pencil and paper, materials he typically did not bring to school, he would not use them for note taking or completing his assignments. Instead, Mark loved to create little pictures of people, animals, or sci-fi figures, and he was very good at it! In fact, he was artistically gifted. To encourage his talent, the practitioner made arrangements for Mark to join an afterschool and Saturday arts program at a local museum. At the program he was not only artistically prolific, but also showed up prepared and motivated.

Mark had found his way of expressing himself and was receiving many compliments and helpful feedback. He was opening up and feeling far better about himself. After a few months, and with some encouragement from the prevention practitioner and teachers, Mark was asked to lead the creation of a school mural based on a story the class had read. He excelled at this task. Not only did it put him at the center of a social activity with peers, it also proved an effective way of re-engaging him with some of his academic work.

By the end of the year, Mark had markedly improved his school record. While still not a star student, he cared about school and was connected. He was no longer failing and was going to get promoted to 8th grade. His family life had also improved. His mother recognized his successes and let him rejoin the afterschool basketball sessions at the Boys and Girls Club. She also recognized his greater involvement at home and the fact that he was "more pleasant to be around."

We knew that introducing prevention practitioners into classrooms would increase both achievement and resilience through supportive, academically focused relationships and referrals to health and mental health professionals and clinics. However, Mark opened our eyes to the significance of afterschool time. In his case, the out-of-school enrichment was initiated at school and the beneficial outcomes were seen in his behavior at school. The linking of the school and non-school worlds brought about this impressive change both in Mark and in so many of the children we have worked with since then.

Mark could serve merely as a story, an example of a youth ready to drop out of school who gained academic and social momentum through the discovery of a gift and the support of a relationship. But Mark's example is more than a reassuring illustration. Mark led us in our conviction that we needed to create a network of afterschool settings that would partner with us to help schools and families achieve their missions of supporting health development, and academic success. Mark also pushed us to think more seriously about developing our own afterschool program as a collaboration between the community, the school, Harvard University, and a mental health consortium consisting of McLean Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital. Throughout all of these exciting developments we have maintained the conviction that afterschool programs need to have a bridge back into the school day and vice versa. We have trained our staff to navigate both of those worlds and to help children like Mark connect them as well.

In this paper, we will address three central themes of community collaborations. First, we will show that the essence of afterschool care and education is partnering among institutions and individuals, a new ethos built around program, family, and child needs. For many funding sources across the U.S., such as the George Soros-initiated Afterschool Corporation in NYC and the Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants, forming partnerships is a requirement to receive grants. But these foundations are not the inventors of this trend; they reflect and reinforce dramatic change in attitude in organizations serving children and families. In the first section of this paper we will argue that we have many exciting collaborations at the grass roots level and increasingly at the level of established institutions such as hospitals, universities, museums, and national youth development organizations, but most work is based on trial and error.

Secondly, we will suggest that most partnerships in afterschool education create what we will call "intermediary environments." We introduce this term as a way to develop a heuristic and a line of systematic research. In this section we will describe some of the special features of afterschool programs that arise from and are governed by collaborations (e.g., Walter, Caplan, & McElvain, 2000). These features can be described by terms such as participatory, creative, supportive, unstable, etc. Borrowing from developmental psychology theory, we define these intermediary environments, especially when they work well, as contexts for significant child development (Vandell & Shumow, 1999).

Thirdly, we expand the theoretical frame and introduce a typology of partnerships and their implications for developing intermediary afterschool spaces. Again, our approach to this typology is that of developmental psychologists interested in using natural ecological contexts where children spend part of their life (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to extend theory to programs and systems.

2. Partnerships at All Levels

We live in an era of partnering, of joining institutional forces to accomplish complex societal changes through finding common ground. Whether it is the local YMCA that works with a school to serve children in the after school hours, a university connecting with a surrounding community, or a city convening funders and businesses, we seem to be moving beyond the so called "Me" or "Self" era of the late 20th Century and into a time of shared social responsibility. Youth seem to be

less focused on rebellion and more interested in social service and contributing to solutions. The "me" orientation was not just an individualistic or narcissistic approach to life, but a preoccupation with defining those boundaries that separate one group's or organization's identity and destiny from those of others.

We may be entering an "era of connection," not just because of the power of technology that connects us across time and space, but also because we are increasingly trying to bridge institutional divides. We are too embedded in these fast and complex changes to appreciate all the facets of this significant transformation. But we all know something significant is occurring in the ways institutions are called upon to work together locally, at the state and federal level, and even globally.

In the arena of youth development and afterschool education, we are also witnessing a new ethos among funders, service providers, and community organizations joining forces to create youth programs. The fact that afterschool programs are typically constructed as collaborations makes them an especially interesting case in point of what is becoming a phenomenon in many sectors of society. San Francisco and Boston are leading examples of cities where funders representing diverse interests have aligned their resources to collectively find solutions. The recent establishment in Boston of a 12 institution, $23 million partnership under the leadership of Mayor Menino and Chairman Chris Gabrielli is an extremely promising example of city-wide afterschool collaborations. When the partnership called "Afterschool for All" was recently inaugurated, the representatives of all the organizations described a sense of historic mission of bringing people and forces together to jointly solve challenges in childcare, youth development, and prevention.

In other fields, similar trends prevail. There are, for example, few specialists left who will argue that we can reduce youth crime rates without an integrated approach that connects many community stakeholders. Even schools, organizations that are accustomed to focusing on autonomy and control, are increasingly inviting many groups and organizations to join in educating children.

From epidemiological and resilience studies we now understand that just as risks are intertwined, so are most solutions. A seriously delinquent child, for example, usually suffers from many long-standing interconnected risk factors such as poverty and violence in the neighborhoods, parental discord, and school failure. In order to support a child's academic achievement and

psychological well being, we must work together to best create healthy and productive environments and relationships (e.g., Grogan & Proscio 2000, Halpern, 1999).

But while we see the need for collaborative prevention strategies to fight childhood and family risk factors, we contend that the belief in partnership is far stronger than the theoretical and empirical understanding about how to accomplish it. Those of us involved in the youth development and the afterschool fields are collectively developing new strategies with neither many models nor a great deal of guidance from those who are traditionally viewed as knowledge generators -- scholars, theorists, and researchers. The information that is available comes from various fields that have remained very separated. Relevant knowledge comes from negotiation theory, studies on non-profit businesses, dynamic systems theory, community development, health and mental health risk and protective factors, and social policy, to mention only a few. What is still lacking is a set of theoretical principles that can help guide our practical steps in developing the best conditions for organizational partnering to support children, youth, and families.

In the next section, we will introduce some organizing ideas as a framework of partnering work that we call "intersectionality theory." We want to suggest with this term that we need to develop clear descriptive and explanatory systems, typologies, and developmental trajectories that can help shape the field into a significant scholarly endeavor and to guide partnering activities. Research is essential, but so is productive model-building. This paper integrates our experiences from community-based interventions and research with observations and evaluations of many afterschool settings to form a typology. In a future step we will want to conduct systematic research around these concepts, including the study of partnerships and their effect on afterschool programming over longer periods of time.

3. Toward a Framework of Collaboration: Intersectionality Theory

To understand organizational collaborations concerned with afterschool programming, we need a guiding framework that will:

1. Apply to many different conditions and contexts so as to have some generalizability

2. Take into account that organizational partnerships evolve as a part of a human system of relationships

3. Support the goal of creating sustainable partnerships

4. Help explain and prevent typical breakdowns and stagnations

5. Make ideas sufficiently explicit that partnerships can be researched and the process and outcomes can be evaluated.

With the goal of developing a framework that contains these five goals, we want to propose a definition and scope of "intersectionality":

The intersectionality framework, very much a work-in-progress, is dedicated to the study of partnering institutions. The framework focuses less on each individual and contributing system than on the intersection between them. The framework, furthermore, is concerned with describing and explaining "intermediary environments," those settings that typically get created at the intersection of collaborating. These environments are called intermediary because they do not belong to any one group or organization and are organizations in their own right. They require the coordination of various stakeholders and "part-owners" as well as new methods of management and conflict resolution. The intermediary aspect of afterschool also derives from often connecting to academic work without serving as a school, from taking aspects from family life (comfort, recreation) without serving as a family, etc. Many collaborations are organized in non-collaborative ways with one group or organization controlling the basic functions and funds of the work. In observing many forms of collaborations, we have become convinced that many will not survive long-term unless new and creative governance structures are put in place. Fortunately, those who have to find solutions in communities across the country are making good progress, and some of these organizations are present at this conference, but there is great need to provide groups with a more refined language and strategies to create productive and sustainable partnerships one of the most significant issues in afterschool education.

Intermediary Environments

Over the past years, afterschool programs have evolved rapidly from single organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA) to collaborative "intermediary" entities located at the intersection between organizations. For example, afterschool programs are frequently housed in

schools, but are often actually extensions of autonomous youth development organizations. What makes after-school settings so fascinating is that they represent a new social space, defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. Afterschools are typically the meeting ground of multiple collaborating organizations, defining a new set of practices, such as recreation, homework, project-based learning, sports, etc. Even the program content is typically not unified, but consists of diverse offerings from collaborating institutions and groups. It is easy to criticize the lack of structure of many programs, or the lack of integration with schools and the surrounding community. It is also easy to become impatient with the lack of adequate pay for workers in these programs, which contribute to high rates of turnover, and makes meaningful training difficult.

But from the perspective of a framework of intersectionality, our primary focus is not risks and limitations. Instead, we will outline some of the ingredients of intermediary environments that are the product of vibrant collaborations:

- Intermediary environments are typically participatory and in a position to foster and model democratic ideals
- Intermediary environments are always evolving; they live in a realm of both productive tension between and nurturance from collaborating organizations
- Intermediary environments are usually creative and innovative;
- They define themselves as different from traditional organizations
- Intermediary environments are vulnerable to potential power struggles as one collaborating group or another may vie for control
- Intermediary environments are typically models of leadership ideal and effective time use. They need to justify themselves by means other than efficiency.
- Even those organizations that single-handedly create afterschool programs are part of intermediary environments because they operate in communities and schools that are not under their control.

My thinking about these new organizational spaces has been influenced by the British child psychoanalyst W.W. Winnicott (e.g., Winnicott, 1975). He has provided a great many insights into what he called "transitional phenomena," a term that has greatly influenced child clinical

psychology and clinical programs for children. Winnicott viewed transitional phenomena as holding environments that are essential for early child development. The very young child develops anxiety when parents are temporarily unavailable. At that time, the "transitional object," typically a teddy bear or blanket, begins to play a very large role in the life of the child. Winnicott views these transitional objects as part of a transitional play space, a world that is not quite reality and not quite fantasy. He views it as a safe space for learning and mastery as well as a way to soothe the self during separations from parents.

You might wonder what Winnicott's theories about transitional space might have to do with afterschool programs and community collaborations. In my own developmental work (e.g., Noam, 1999; Noam, Higgins, & Goethals, 1982) I have come to recognize that we actively construct many intermediary environments throughout child, adolescent, and even adult development, and other environments are created for us. The pre-school pretend play spaces or dress-up corners are intermediary environments for the young child to try on roles such as "being like mommy or daddy," or the monster that inhabits her nightmares. The adolescent requires a safe place for experimentation, identity formation, solving crises, and making choices. Afterschool programs can serve these roles as intermediary environments for youth. For many late adolescents, college represents such an intermediary, transitional learning space. And in the transition to the professional world, mastery is often gained through transitional relationships with career mentors and coaches. While each of these intermediary environments and relationships is quite different, they all possess most of the traits that we outlined above. Additionally, all of these environments:

- take into account the fragility of growth and the need to provide the right conditions to protect the person in times of transition.
- are developmental contexts; they imply the outgrowing of these environments after a period of maturation and learning.
- are psychological, social, and educational; they are protective, challenging, and age-appropriate.

These are deceptively simple ideas and yet schools, our most important child institutions, have not fully appreciated their significance. Young adolescents, as Eccles has shown so convincingly (e.g., Eccles, 1999), are typically in large and anonymous schools that do not foster

what they most need-- a sense of belonging, a way to be recognized, and a place for productive peer-based social and learning experiences. It is partly because schools are failing many children (the double meaning is intended!) that so many people dedicate themselves to afterschools and to the idea of intermediary, developmental environments. These programs combine support, child development, fun, and learning in ways that we wish schools could achieve. If schools could accomplish the task, we could extend their hours instead of needing to develop separate intermediary environments. It is the flexibility and participatory nature of collaboration- the process nature of the work- that provides a great potential to evolve settings that foster the development of children. Institutions that experiment and show flexibility are often equipped to respond flexibly to the changing children's needs in development. What undermines this potential is the when flexibility combines with a lack of structure or even chaos.

Intermediary environments typically have three major vulnerabilities stemming from the high expectations placed upon them:

1. To be creative and innovative, programs need to be extremely flexible and allow for a great deal of child and family participation. They should not only program for children, but also encourage child-initiated projects at all levels. Intermediary environments are about development, and development occurs not just through instruction, but through discovery. However, f settings with too few or undertrained staff tend to fluctuate between over-structuring activities and becoming chaotic.

2. Intermediary environments need to remain fluid and responsive to the needs of the participants, yet most institutions do not remain flexible. Allowing for openness can easily be misinterpreted as a lack of leadership and invite a struggle between partnering organizations.

3. Intermediary environments easily come to be everything to everyone. Program time will be used for increased and supervised homework, to expand learning opportunities, to raise test scores, and to provide tutoring. Programs create a supportive youth development context (e.g., Larsen, 2000) to increase moral and ethical development. They will counteract the school's reduction in arts education. They will develop projects and community service, and will

counteract the trends toward obesity in children through exercise and sports. The large number of potential goals decrease the chances that the program can successfully attend to any of them.

In order to further explore the nature of intermediary environments, we will now focus on how partnering organizations intersect to create and maintain this space. By focusing on collaborations between organizations and groups, we return to intermediary afterschool spaces they create.

4. Four Types of Intersectionality

In this section, we will introduce four types of intersection that apply to many types of collaboration, but that we will explain in the context of after-school programs. Although the types can be stable over long periods of time, this typology has elements of how systems can develop over time. The following is an ideal typology of different kinds of intersections:

1. Discovering Overlapping Interests (**Functional** Intersection)
2. Joining Forces (**Collaborative** Intersection)
3. Developing an Inclusive System (**Interconnected** Intersection)
4. Changing All Partners (**Transformational** Intersection)

Note that many partnerships in real life will combine different types, like in individual development people can function at various developmental levels at the same time (e.g., Noam et al 1999). Crises and opportunities will bring out different types of partnering.

Intersection I: Overlapping Interests (Functional)

Leaders in the youth development and education "business" frequently receive last minute grant applications requesting partnering organizations to submit a joint plan for afterschool programming. If there is sufficient time, some meetings are arranged and ground rules are established. But the formation of a partnership is often done under great time constraints and is based on common interests of programming and funding requirements. Each participating organization recognizes benefits and participates out of its own mission and strategic plan. The type of collaboration is clearly functional since it leads to the following ends: to make programming

possible; to gain access to children, families, and funds; or to gain access to previously closed settings such as schools or communities.

This type of partnership typically leads to an intermediary space with separate program elements run by each institution in a sub-contracting arrangement. Each partner is eager to maintain autonomy and to be efficient in providing services. Partners are often concerned that too much collaboration will undermine efficiency and that it will create confusing lines of reporting. A few years back as part of an evaluation of a national after-school consortium, my team and I visited a number of sites throughout the country. Each program was based in a school yet coordinated by a youth development organization and was helped by a variety of other groups. The programs were all able to attract children and families and had interesting program content. However, most programs' components were very separate. The links to the schools were tenuous, and though the independent activities were sometimes quite strong, the programs usually lacked true integration and a joint mission.

We conducted a focus group with young adolescents in one such program. The youth told us that they were quite happy with the weekly outings to learn about various work settings. Unfortunately, the organization that provided the vans used a vehicle previously used by a pre-school and decorated for really young children. The teenagers could not focus in our interviews on much else than the humiliation they had felt each week as they had to enter the "baby bus" in front of their peers who were leaving the school building at the same time. This situation, which could have been easily changed, shows the lack of connection between programs, schools, and youth. The "vendor" who provided the van and the trips was not integrated into the overall planning of the program; in fact the afterschool was lacking much overall integration and staff meetings that could have prevented this year-long humiliation.

Intersection II: Joining Forces (Collaborative)

In this collaborative model, partners become accountable to each other in very new ways. They typically begin to identify and explicate their common goals, learn from each other, build on each other's strengths, and experience a sense of collective goal-setting. Partners identify themselves as working together in the community and tend to take pride in their collaborations.

They create an organizational structure that provides a strong voice for each participant, common operating procedures, a bi-directional reporting system, and a mechanism to resolve disagreements. The programs frequently have full-time coordinators and a management team. Where as in the functional type of programming the main issue is whether the partners performs their duties, in the collaborative model conflict management comes to the forefront and there is more engagement and give and take between the partners.

The intermediary environment that gets created for children and youth is typically one highlighting the importance of responsibility and cooperation. Virtues of punctuality, order, and structure are often stressed. Programs also often create a productive discipline code and procedures. But they often do not do well in creating warm environments, as program management is focused on making things run.

Intersection III: Inclusive System (Interconnected).

This type of intersection between partners is less concerned with governance and reporting lines. There is a sense of intimacy between the partners and their staff and organizational issues might be sufficiently worked out to consider the collaboration as a separate, new entity. Differences typically lead to discussions and debates, which in turn can create more closeness. There is a sense of care-taking, not only of the children and families, but also of the partners. They defend each other from outside criticism, even if it might not be in their strategic interest. We often observe a strong ethos of solidarity With program leaders asking "How did we ever serve these kids and families alone?!" Program staff feel enriched by working together.

There are, as with all models, some vulnerabilities. Program staff and leaders can become so fearful of damaging the strong sense of inclusion and connection that they avoid addressing differences. As a consequence, programs can unwittingly encourage the formation of cliques that collectively act out differences instead of processing them.

Unfortunately, anxieties about governance, money, power, and bureaucratic control make it rare for institutions to reach this level of interconnectedness. The community-orientation of afterschools holds a great deal of promise because the community process can enhance this form of interconnectedness better than collaborating institutions acting alone. Program staff hired by the

program itself are often more willing to engage in joint work than are leaders of the participating organizations. This is a very unfortunate problem because, as we have witnessed both here in the U.S. and internationally, programs that have established this kind of community provide children with a sense of belonging essential for their development and their learning.

Intersection IV: Changing All Partners (Transformational)

The fourth type, transformational intersection, is the most complex. While few programs currently reach this point, we predict that will increase as the field of afterschool care and education matures. In this model, partners are doing more than creating a strong community and a joint mission. They go one step further and develop together. Obviously, there is some growth for each partner in all of the models we just described. Becoming accountable to another group is a form of development, and so is collaborating in a new setting or creating a joint community. But this transformational form of development is different. It is the creation of a new framework, a new way of understanding children, families, and communities. This shift in perspective makes rereading one's mission statement an act of learning about the history of one's organization, not its present or future course. The new outlook is also a recognition that the organization will always be transforming and that structures have to be found that do not get in the way of progress. Partnering ends up being less of a strategic tool and more a way of life.

The partners are typically far less preoccupied with their own organizations than they are with the common good. While many organizations make this claim, it is obvious when groups actually live by these principles. The benefit of this model over the interconnected one is that learning is an essential ingredient. There is no transformation of values and perspective either individually or collectively without a process of learning. This premium on growing becomes a value that permeates all of the group's activities. Afterschool programs also become most effective and can best create a developmental context for children when adults and children are engaged in deep learning together. Anyone who has witnessed the transforming power of an important cause on all participating members and organizations can appreciate the potential. Many transformations in afterschool settings will be less revolutionary, but they can nonetheless fundamentally change the attitude of all parties involved.

5. Conclusion

A few weeks ago, a student in my class on afterschool education and policy at Harvard poignantly summarized her work experience in an afterschool setting: "Until recently, when I told people that I am working in an afterschool program their response was 'And what will you do afterwards?' This question always made me wonder. But now I think the afterwards is the work in afterschools." It is, in part, the development of a field that is making such a statement possible and that has, we believe, also led to this conference. But it is also this young woman's experience of being transformed by children and families and of being part of community collaborations.

We cannot underestimate the meaning these experiences have for all people and organizations involved. We view this as a great responsibility collectively held by all of us who have committed to this work. Our policy and programming decisions about afterschool care and education should be based on creating healthy intermediary afterschool environments where staff, children, and families can grow in nurturing learning communities. What Mark taught us many years ago continues to guide our work of connecting the fragmented parts of children's lives and to help unify them in creative and participatory ways. What a chance we have to create these environments that have sufficient structure to make children not only safe and organized, but open to wonder, question, and explore!

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